

## **Stephen P. Mugar (1901-1982)**

When you go to the supermarket, you buy meat that is pre-packaged in shrink wrap; your onions come in mesh string bags; items are unit-priced (e.g., a 13 ounce can of coffee is unit-priced per pound so that you can compare the value against other coffees packed in 12 ounce cans); when you check out, you can have your purchases packed in paper bags; and often times, your bags are put in boxes and sent out on conveyor belt. All of these innovations that we take for granted were developed by Stephen P. Mugar at 28 Mt. Auburn St., home of the original Star Market.

Stephen P. derMugardichian was born in Karpert, Armenia, and immigrated to this country as a very young child. In 1916, his father Sarkis Mugar (the family shortened their name) bought a small market at 28 Mt. Auburn St. and called it Star Market. The family lived on Bartlett St. at the top of Palfrey Hill. In 1922 Sarkis was killed in an automobile accident, and Stephen, along with his cousin John, took over the management of his father's store. In 1932, he opened his second store in Newtonville, and in 1937 expanded to Wellesley. In 1948 they opened another store in Newtonville which was their first supermarket. Here, they used the earliest microwave in the store's luncheonette. Prior to this time, food markets were grocery stores, the ma & pop corner store, the meat market, produce stands. They were small, cozy, and provided personal attention; but most times you had to go to several stores to shop. Food was not pre-packaged, and you asked the butcher for a pound of lamb chops or ground beef. Life was slower then; you waited while the butcher selected the meat, sought your approval, then prepared it.

Over the years, the cousins developed the innovations mentioned above. Markets became self-serve, one-stop shopping, known as supermarkets. With DuPont, they developed pre-packaging for meats & fruits & vegetables, and the mesh string bags for onions. They worked with Union Paper Bag Co. to develop stronger & larger paper bags. Because of the Mugar's, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to mandate unit pricing.

For their employees, they had employee benefits like profit sharing and time off for school; in 1963 they were the first to build a store over the Mass. Pike.

Stephen was a great philanthropist; he loved books and gave generously to BU & Northeastern's libraries. A building at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy at Tufts is called Mugar Hall. The Armenian Library & Museum of America is called the Mugar Building. His son David is the primary force behind the annual Fourth of July concert & fireworks on the Esplanade.

The building at 28 Mt. Auburn St. still stands, physically unchanged, but now housing the Italian Kitchen & Bath store.